[Arthur Botsford]

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Interview with Arthur Botsford

“Well [?] sir, I don't think ther 's much more I can tell you about the old days. You know all about the history of the company, or what you don't know you can find easy enough in books. I take it you don't want that routine stuff.

“But it might freshen up my memory a little to recall some of it. When old Seth died, Aaron became president; everybody can tell you stories about him, but they ain't many can tell you about Seth because there's no one around that knew him. But I heard my father tell many's the story about him, if I could just remember them all. There's one, I don't know if you'd want it or not, because it's a mite salty.”

Mr. Botsford then related the following little [?] Rabelaisian incident which may or may not be of value:

“Seems 'twas a long walk to the johnny the room where my father worked, and at noon hour, just before they went back to their benches, they had a habit of relieving themselves at a small door which opened onto the back yard. Right below the door was a pile of choice lumber, and old Seth he heard [?] about what was going on, and he give strict orders that anyone caught in the act was to be fired right off.

“That stopped the practice, all right all right, but one day a few months later, one of the boys had the urge and instead of running 'way up to the right place he opened [?] the door.

“There was old Seth as big as life and twice [?] as nasty, using that lumber pile for the very purpose he had forbidden. When he saw the feller lookin' at him, he roared: [?] 'Get back in there, you so-and-so. [?] I know [?] what you was [?] stickin' your head out there for. Just remember I'm [??] payin' for this lumber and I can do what I damn please with it—You can't.'”

2

“When my father went to work along in the fifties, a man named Prince was the superintendent. He used to live in that house right next to the gasoline station, across from the company's main plant on South Main street there.

“Prince had the reputation of being kind of a close fisted person. He was fond of apples—had a whole orchard of them in back of his house. He used to come in the shop every day eating apples, and the boys [?] noticed they were always carefully sliced in places where they'd been specked.

“Prince used to keep them in his cellar, and he always took the bad ones to eat, an' cut out the rotten places It was years before he found out that by doing that he never had any good ones. The boys said he was mortified most to death, and after that he took them as they came and gave himself the treat of eating a good one [?] ever so often.

“They had a custom in them days—the clockmakers did—and [?] its a cryin' [shame?] it ever went out of style—of pitching in and helping each other in the tight places. You know that little old high house up on Skunk Hill—looks like it was built on stilts. That house was built by a man named W H. Norwall, and everybody—or most everbody—in the shop gave him a day's work. My father did for one.

“How's that? Why the man couldn't afford to pay for having it built, so the boys all chipped in and helped him out the only way they could—with the work of their hands. Yessir, there was lots of that kind of thing in the old days. If anyone was sick, his friends all offered to help the family watch over him—many a night my father sat up with sick people.

“They was mostly all Yankees here then, you can tell by the names in this old book (Mr Botsford thumbs the leaves over, reads some of the names) “There's a few Irish and Germans here—most of the rest though are Yanks. I can remember how some of these old fellows looked, though I [?] was only a boy when I knew them.

3

'There's a name—Norton—he came there to be superintendent of the cotton mill, and his son—he's a little older than me, he worked in the clock shop for years. He wrote a book on his life experiences some time ago—understand he paid for the printing himself—and he sent me a complimentary copy.

“It mentions the old [?] bell on top of the cotton mill that used to summon the workers to the shop and release them, too, and toll the curfew every night—yes we used to have curfew here. Norton had a sentimental feeling for that old bell. And so have I. It lies down under the old bank building on Elm street [?] to this day, and it was Norton's idea, and mine before [?] him, if I do say it myself, that the old bell should be brought to light and [?] set up some place where people could see it, and some kind of a proper inscription placed on it. For it played a mighty big part in the early history of this [?] here town, and there was something kinder about it, in a way, than these damn whistles.

“I don't know as you want to know any of the Thomaston history, though that's kind of background for the clock industry. I told you about the Potters and their gun factory. [?] Maybe you heard about that place down in the Reynolds Bridge [Meadows?] where [t??] Indians burned a [f?] fellow [named?] Scott at the stake. But I'll bet you didn't know that the first matches—Diamond matches—were made near the Wigwam reservoir.

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“And that the Terry family—the ones that used to make clocks before Seth Thomas—used to own a [big?] [?] woollen mill south of the Knife Company. And Terry's bridge, by [t??] the way, was the first iron bridge across the Naugatuck, it's still standing. That's something for you to write.”

Mr. Botsford seems to be running dry of information—has a tendency toward [?] repetition and dwells interminably on unimportant details. But he is perfectly willing to answer questions and is one of the most cooperative of the men with whom I have talked so far. He is in fact, eager, to impart information. Any further suggestions for Mr. Botsford?